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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GVN RESPONDS TO CRITICISM ON RETURNED MIGRANTS

REF: A. Phnom Penh 1162 B. Hanoi 1848 C. Hanoi 1829 D. State 133110 E. Phnom Penh 1178

1. (SBU) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Americas Department Deputy Director General Pham Van Que called in Acting DCM July 22 to respond to the Ambassador's demarche July 21 (Ref B) and the State Department Spokesman's statement on the repatriation of ethnic minority Vietnamese migrants from the Central Highlands.

2. (SBU) Que said the GVN is aware of the concern of some organizations and individuals regarding the return of the migrants from Cambodia to Vietnam. The Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam carried out the repatriation of the 94 migrants July 20, Que confirmed. The original intent was to return 107 individuals, he said, but six had been allowed to stay at the last minute, and seven had been found to be Cambodian citizens. The 94 returnees will be well treated, Que said, and will not face punishment for illegally crossing the border. Further, local Vietnamese representatives of UNHCR will be allowed to visit the area and the migrants (and have already visited the area three times recently) and the chief representative of UNHCR in Bangkok will also be allowed to visit them.

3. (SBU) Que explained that Vietnam is trying to avoid a repeat of the experiences of the 1970s and 1980s when Vietnamese citizens crossed the border in large numbers and were kept indefinitely in refugee camps, not able to resettle or return to Vietnam. Eventually, those citizens were brought back under the "comprehensive program of action" which was very successful; that is the model for current Vietnamese treatment of its returned citizens.

4. (SBU) The Acting DCM made the point to Que that the United States and the International Community are focused on the issue of an international monitoring presence in the Central Highlands to ensure that the returnees do not face persecution or abuse. He encouraged the GVN to accept as soon as possible UNHCR's request to station an expatriate as the Chief of Mission in Hanoi. He passed on copies of the letters sent by the High Commissioner for Refugees to the Vietnamese UN Mission in Geneva and to Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nien proposing an Italian candidate for the position and asked Que to forward them to the relevant offices for quick and favorable consideration. Que agreed to forward the letters. The Acting DCM also asked Que to support the USG's request to have USG personnel visit the returnees in the Central Highlands soon. Que was noncommittal.

MARINE